

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-12

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R 121155Z JUL 73

FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5787

INFBNRUSBAE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 6271

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, NP

SUBJECT: SINGHA DURBAR FIRE

REF: STATE 135668 AND PREVIOUS

1. SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTER BISTA TOLD ME GON IS CURRENTLY ASSESSING DAMAGE AND IS NOT YET READY TO DETERMINE WHAT SORTS OF ASSISTANCE MOST URGENTLY REQUIRED. FROM WHAT HE SAID, AND FROM OTHER INFORMATION THAT HAS BECOME AVAILABLE SINCE OUR LAST REPORT, IT APPEARS THAT IN CERTAIN KEY AREAS, NOTABLY COMMUNICATIONS, GON LUCKED OUT AND IN GENERAL NEPALESE CIVIL SERVICE IS DOING BETTER THAN INITIALLY EXPECTED IN SHIFTING TO TEMPORARY QUARTERS AND IMPROVISING WAYS OF MAINTAINING ESSENTIAL SERVICES. THEREFORE, PENDING FURTHER ADVICE FROM GON, I DO NOT PLAN TO INVOKE AUTHORITY IN 2 FAM 060 TO DETERMINE THAT DISASTER EXISTS AND EXERCISE AUTHORITY USE UP TO \$25,000 EMERGENCY FUNDS.
END SUMMARY.

2. UK AMBASSADOR AND I CALLED ON PRIME MINISTER BISTA IN HIS TEMPORARY OFFICE BEHIND NATIONAL PANCHAYAT BUILDING THIS AFTERNOON BY APPOINTMENT. WE EACH MADE POINT THAT OUR GOVERNMENTS WISH TO BE HELPFUL, BUT REQUIRE GON TO IDENTIFY FOR US AREAS OF GREATEST DAMAGE AND TO INDICATE TO US WHAT WAS MOST
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NEEDED BEFORE WE COULD CONSIDER TANGIBLE ASSISTANCE.

3. PRIME MINISTER REPLIED THAT GON ACTIVELY ASSESSING THESE VERY QUESTIONS AT PRESENT BUT HE WAS NOT YET IN A POSITION GIVE US EITHER SPECIFIC INFORMATION OR REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE. HE INDICATED THAT PROBLEM OF FINDING TEMPORARY HOUSING FOR DISPLACED MINISTRIES HAD BEEN LARGELY SOLVED AND THAT ESSENTIAL SERVICES WERE BEING MAINTAINED. IN COMMUNICATIONS, GON HAD BEEN VERY LUCKY, SINCE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT RADIO STATION, IMMEDIATELY BEHIND SINGHA DURBAR BUILDING, HAD BEEN SAVED, EVEN THOUGH FIRE HAD SERIOUSLY THREATENED TO ENGULF THAT AREA TOO. (NOTE: FROM OTHER SOURCES WE HAVE LEARNED THAT A COUPLE HUNDRED NEW TELEPHONE LINES HAD BEEN PREPARED JUST BEFORE FIRE, AND HAVE NOW BEEN DISTRIBUTED TO DISPLACED MINISTRIES RATHER THAN TO OTHER CUSTOMERS AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED. AT LEAST MINIMAL TELEPHONE CONNECTIONS APPEAR TO BE WORKING TO AND BETWEEN DISPLACED MINISTRIES AT PRESENT.)

4. PRINCIPAL PROBLEM AT PRESENT ACCORDING TO PRIME MINISTER WAS SORTING FILES, IDENTIFYING WHAT WAS MISSING, AND ARRANGING FOR DUPLICATION AND APPROPRIATE STORAGE OF WHAT HAD BEEN SAVED. GON WAS IN TROUBLE REGARDING FILES ON SUCH MATTERS AS EXCISE DUTIES, BUT WAS ALL RIGHT AS FAR AS RECORDS OF GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE WERE CONCERNED SINCE COPIES HAD AUTOMATICALLY BEEN SENT TO AUDITOR GENERAL'S OFFICE WHICH OUTSIDE SINGHA DURBAR. MANY ORIGINAL TREATIES AND OTHER FOREIGN POLICY DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN LOST BUT PRESUMABLY COPIES CAN BE OBTAINED LATER FROM OTHER GOVERNMENTS.

5. AMBASSADOR O'BRIEN EXPRESSED PERSONAL HOPE THAT CENTRAL SECRETARIAT WOULD NOT BE RECONSTRUCTED ALONG SAME LINES AS ORIGINAL SINGHA DURBAR BUT WOULD BE DESIGNED MORE WITH VIEW TO FUNCTIONS FOR WHICH IT INTENDED. PRIME MINISTER INDICATED GON CURRENTLY ENVISAGED SERIES OF SIMPLE, MODERN BUILDINGS FOR INDIVIDUAL MINISTRIES IN GENERAL SINGHA DURBAR AREA RATHER THAN ONE MASSIVE STRUCTURE AS HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN THE CASE -- INCLUDING, HE NOTED, A FIREPROOF CENTRAL RECORDS DEPOT. (NOTE: INDIAN EMB REPS HAVE PRIVATELY INDICATED TO ME CONCERN THAT GON MAY REQUEST EITHER GOI OR USG TO BUILD NEW SECRETARIAT FOR IT. I DETECTED NO SUCH INTENTION FROM PRIME MINISTER, WHO SEEMED TO BE THINKING IN TERMS OF USING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NEPALESE RESOURCES TO PUT UP THE "MODEST" NEW MINISTERIAL HOUSING HE ENVISAGED.)

6. COMMENT: FOR THE MOMENT, NEPAL'S CIVIL SERVICE SEEMS TO BE ADJUSTING TO DESTRUCTION OF ITS TRADITIONAL HABITAT MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN WE HAD INITIALLY CONSIDERED POSSIBLE. UNTIL AND UNLESS WE GET CLEARER SIGNAL FROM PRIME MINISTER REGARDING IMMEDIATE RELIEF NEEDS THAN HE WAS ABLE TO GIVE

TODAY, IT WOULD NOT APPEAR CONSISTENT WITH APPLICABLE
REGULATIONS FOR ME TO DETERMINE THAT DISASTER EXISTS AND TO
TAKE FOLLOW-ON STEPS SUCH AS USING \$25,000 EMERGENCY FUND. IT
MAY TURN OUT EVENTUALLY THAT BEST USG REACTION WILL BE TO
CONCENTRATE ON LONGER TERM IMPROVEMENTS IN NEPALESE ADMINISTRATIVE
PRACTICES, E.G., IN HELPING THEM OUT ON IMPROVED SYSTEMS FOR
DATA STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL RATHER THAN IN TRYING TO RUSH IN
EMERGENCY SUPPLIES. HOWEVER, OUR FINAL DETERMINATION ON THIS
MUST AWAIT FURTHER WORD FROM AND CONSULTATION WITH GON.
COON

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